

File Code: 2520/1950**Date:** March 6, 2013

Dear Friend of the Ashley:

The Vernal Ranger District is seeking your input on two proposed reroutes and two seasonal road and trail closures. One proposed reroute is located in Greens Draw on Forest Road 49 (FR 49), with the seasonal closures affecting FR 49 and Forest Trails 003 and 004 (FT 003, FT 004). The second proposed reroute is located in the Bowden Draw on Forest Road 177 (FR 177), with the second seasonal closure affecting FR 177 and Forest Trail 008 (FT 008). This letter provides you with information on the purpose of and need for the project and the proposed action. It also supplies information on how and where to submit your comments regarding the proposal.

Background and Summary

The Cart Creek watershed on the Ashley National Forest (the Forest) is part of the vast backyard area of the Eastern Uinta Mountains, with dispersed camping, off-highway vehicle and snowmobile use, and big game hunting from the local communities and area visitors. Motorized vehicle use on undesignated routes as well as on designated roads and trails through sensitive resource areas has had a negative impact on riparian and meadow habitat. This is causing soil erosion and loss and contributes to an increased sediment delivery to the streams within the watershed. In 2009, the Forest signed the Record of Decision and the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Motorized Travel Plan; implementation of this plan has been ongoing since with the goal to improve the management of public summer motorized use. Travel management implementation is achieved by designating roads and motorized trails that are open for public motor vehicle use while reducing impacts to forest resources. Within the Cart Creek watershed, there are two designated travel management proposal areas. One is in Greens Draw on FR 049/FT 004 and the other is located in Bowden Draw on FR 177/FT 008. This project proposes to relocate portions of these motorized routes and use seasonal closures to help mitigate resource damage occurring in these areas of the watershed.

Location

The proposed Greens Draw reroute would start in the northwest of section 21 about 1.6 miles out on FR 49 from Hwy 191 (Township 1 North, Range 22 East). The reroute would enter section 16 from the southwest and traverse the section to the northeast ending in the upper northeast corner (Township 1 North, Range 22 East). Total length of the reroute would be approximately 1.33 miles in length (see map).

The proposed Bowden Draw reroute would start in the central part of section 28 about 2.0 miles out on FR 177 from Hwy 191 (Township 1 North, Range 22 East). The reroute would traverse northeast entering section 27 in the northwest corner and then entering section 22 in the



southeast corner. The proposed reroute would end in the central part of section 22 and would be approximately 1.35 miles in length (see map).

The legal description of the project is:

Salt Lake Meridian; Township 1 North, Range 22 East; portions of sections 2, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16, 21, 22, 23, 24, 27, 28.

Salt Lake Meridian; Township 1 North, Range 23 East; portions of section 7.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of this project would be to reroute segments of the FR 049 (Greens Draw Road) and the FR 177 (Bowden Draw Road) to help mitigate watershed damage occurring in the current road locations and to provide for safe passage for Forest users traveling these motorized routes. On both roads, the current routes are traversing wet meadows where users are proliferating unauthorized routes to find a way around the wet sections. Rutting and braiding are occurring, as well as unnecessary sediment delivery to the streams. The proposed reroutes are needed to address these watershed issues by moving the road out of the bottom of the wet meadows to dry locations in the trees. These proposed reroutes would also address two outstanding priority travel management projects listed with specific outcomes in the 2009 Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Motorized Travel Plan. Overall, these two projects would help realize the goals of improving meadow and riparian health, addressing soil erosion and loss issues, and decreasing sediment delivery to streams in the Forest's priority watershed. Also, by utilizing seasonal closures, further resource damage would be avoided during spring thaw and would improve the areas for wildlife benefit.

Proposed Action

The proposed action includes a reroute for the last 1.33 miles of FR 49 (Greens Draw Road) before it turns into FT 004. Currently, this section of road travels in the middle of Greens Draw, with multiple user created routes and crossings through wet areas where rutting is occurring. This action would also close two very prominent unauthorized routes cutting all the way across the meadow to get to the Greens Draw Waterfall. To still provide forest users access to the waterfall, it is proposed that a small parking area be established as well as the designation of a non-motorized trail across the meadow to the waterfall. The proposed action would also restrict access at the end of FR 049 to only allow vehicles less than fifty inches to continue on FT 004. The proposed action also includes the development of a borrow pit. This material would be used on various engineering and roads projects throughout the watershed. The pit would be located adjacent to FR 049 (UTM 630956E 4519663N) and already has the footprint of an unauthorized route leading to the site. The borrow pit would remain open after the completion of the reroutes as a continued source of material for future roads projects.

The proposed action also includes a reroute for the last 1.35 miles of FR 177 (Bowden Draw Road) before it turns into motorized FT 008 (Kettle Creek Trail). Currently, this section of road

runs along the bottom of the wet meadow, crossing several perennial and ephemeral stream channels. There are several sections that, even during drought conditions, tend to still be impassable. The proposed reroute already has a well-traveled unauthorized route leading up to the trees where the proposed route would contour along the hillside to the end of the wet meadow. This proposed action would also restrict access at the terminus of FR 177 to only allow vehicles less than fifty inches to continue on FT 008.

It is proposed that for both reroutes, the volume of timber located on the proposed road corridor be assessed for merchantability. This timber may be harvested through a commercial timber sale contract prior to the construction of the road. After both relocated roads are open for public use, the segments of the original route would undergo rehabilitation. Restrictive access and signs may be put in place to keep motorized traffic off the closed portions. As deemed necessary in the field, areas may be ripped, seeded, or topped off with slash or mulch. In areas where there is evidence of gullying, plugs from the surrounding meadow or other methods may be used to help slow down erosion.

In both Bowden Draw and Greens Draw, the proposed action also includes seasonal closures. These would start on September 30th to cut off motorized use to help increase elk distribution and hunter yield in both areas. The closure would last until June 1st to have the area remain closed to motorized use through the elk calving period and to help prevent further resource damage during the spring thaw. The closure in Greens Draw would be located at the gate between the Cart Creek Pasture (McKee Draw Allotment) and the Greens Draw Pasture (Bowden Draw Allotment) on FR 049 (UTM 630646E 4518737N). This would also impose a seasonal closure on FT 004 and FT 003. FT 003 (Pipe Creek Trail) exits the Forest boundary to the east and a closure point would be located there as well. The closure in Bowden Draw would be located at the gate between the East McKee Pasture and the Bowden Draw Pasture in the Bowden Draw Allotment on FR 177 (UTM 630824E 4516480N). This would also impose a seasonal closure on FT 008 (Kettle Creek Trail). A gate would also be needed where this trail exits the Forest.

Decision Framework

Based on public comments submitted in response to this scoping notice, and on site-specific analysis, the responsible official will determine whether significant issues or concerns exist. The responsible official will also determine:

- The appropriate level of environmental analysis documentation.
- The appropriate mitigation measures to employ in protecting resources in the immediate project area.

Public Involvement


We are accepting public comments on this proposal. Comments would be most useful if received within 30 days of publication (expected on March 13, 2013) of the legal notice of this

proposal in the *Vernal Express*. Comments should be specific to this project, have a direct relationship to the proposed action, and include supporting information that the Responsible Official should consider in reaching a decision. This comment period provides those interested in or affected by this proposal an opportunity to make their concerns known prior to a decision being made by the Responsible Official.

Written comments must be submitted to: the District Ranger Nicholas T. Schmelter, at the Vernal Ranger District Office at 355 North Vernal Avenue, Vernal, UT 84078. The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are: 8:00 to 4:30, Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Electronic comments may be submitted in Word (.doc), Portable Document Format (.pdf), or Rich Text Format (.rtf), with "Cart Creek Watershed Roads Improvement Project" in the subject line, to comments-intermtn-ashley@fs.fed.us. To obtain additional information regarding the proposal, please contact Project Leader Melissa Hendrickson at 435-781-5137 (email mrhendrickson@fs.fed.us).

Thank you for your continuing interest and participation in the management of the Ashley National Forest.

Sincerely,



NICHOLAS T. SCHMELTER
District Ranger

Enclosure